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THE ASHES: Panesar hopes for call up after being ignored

MONTY: MY PAIN AT SNUB

It hurt, says spinner

MONTY PANESAR last night spoke of his bitter disappointment at being snubbed for the first two Ashes Tests.

The spin king was controversially overlooked in favour of Ashley Giles and Jimmy Anderson, who have taken just five wickets between them while being smashed for 565 runs.

Giles has failed to turn the ball all tour and dropped a crucial catch off Ricky Ponting.

So despite the batsmen's second innings collapse in Adelaide, it is most likely to be the bowling attack that changes for the third Test in Perth, leading to renewed calls for Panesar to be picked.

Panesar said: "It's flattering to see people in Australia – and England – wanting me to play.

"Obviously from my point of view, I'm not putting pressure on myself.

"I am just going to keep bowling the way I have done since I started in international cricket.

Focus

"I can obviously understand the balance of the side and the importance of it but from my point of view I'm disappointed that I didn't get a chance."

"All I can do is focus on the next Test match that is coming and try to get myself in contention for it."

"Giles obviously performed in the first and second Tests – he performed his role given to him."

"There have been a couple of unfortunate incidents for him – you know, him dropping the catch and maybe in the second innings with the bowling."

England's decision to leave out Panesar has been widely condemned and captain Andrew Flintoff is believed to have had a difference of opinion with coach Duncan Fletcher over who should play.

In the aftermath of the second Test defeat in Adelaide, Fletcher hinted it had been Flintoff who insisted Anderson should be kept in.

Panesar, 24, is just as popular Down Under as he is back home, where he is in the final 10 shortlist for Sunday's BBC Sports Personality of the Year award.

If he wins the award it would not only enhance his ever-growing cult



from MARTIN ROGERS
in Perth

following – it would be a major source of embarrassment to Flintoff and Fletcher.

Panesar added: "It would be a great double to win it and be included for the third Test."

"I first heard my name mentioned a couple of months back for the

award – and getting into the last ten is very flattering indeed."

"It would be nice and absolutely amazing if I do win it but it is up to the public back home. Hopefully we will wait and see on Sunday."

Other nominees include golfer Darren Clarke, darts legend Phil Taylor plus boxers Joe Calzaghe and Ricky Hatton.



HOGGARD: Torrent of abuse

Fans plan a Hogg roast

MATTHEW HOGGARD has been warned he faces an angry backlash in next week's third Test after questioning the intelligence of Aussie fans.

Hoggard lifted the lid on the hostile treatment England players receive Down Under and took a swipe at the local fans.

In an interview with the official Barmy Army magazine, Barmy Harmonies, he said: "Some of the (Aussie) fans are not the brightest of people but they are passionate about their cricket."

"They are always questioning your parentage and abusing your family so it is quite a hard place to

be down on the boundary." Hoggard is now likely to receive extra stick at Perth's WACA ground.

Warren Livingstone, founder of the Fanatics – Australia's equivalent of the Barmy Army, said: "If he has shown he can be put off his game by comments from the crowd he might find it happening more often."

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FORMER point-to-point rider Mike Hammond has only had a training licence for six weeks but Elgar gave him his second victory from just four runners at Huntingdon yesterday, writes TONY LEWIS

The nine-year-old got the ball rolling at Chelstow last month but looked to have a fight on his hands as Major Blade came up to challenge at the last.

Elgar, though kept himself composed and popped it, whereas Major Blade put in a tired leap and came down. "I've got ten horses to train

RACING ROUND-UP

for the owner Sylvia Talton at Broadheath in Worcestershire, but I do have horses for other owners too," Hammond said.

"I used to ride in points - slowly and badly - and when I decided to try training, Sylvia asked me to move to her yard, which I now lease."

Fermon gave Richard Strachan and his partners their 50th winner from Henry Daly's Ludlow yard when justifying favouritism. In the WBX Novices Handicap Chase and Theatre Diva quickly made it 51 over at Ludlow.

"Our last winner was Green Tango at Perth in April," said Strachan. "But sadly he broke a shoulder in his last race at Ascot and had to pull out."

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BIRD TALK

RACING TIPS



Zoey Hannon is well known as TV's At The Races expert. She also knows the game when it comes to tipping winners.

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GOING: Good to Soft-Soft in Places

PLACEPOT: First six races.

TRACKFACTS

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TOP TRAINERS

(with runners) Jonjo O'Neill, 17 winners, (24% strike rate), +£2.66, Mrs S J Smith 14, (11%), -£13.15, E Williams 12, (32%), +£12.09, Miss V Williams 9, (24%), -£6.09, R Lee 5, (21%), +£0.57, R Alner 5, (29%), +£5.88, B Powell 3, (9%), -£0.52, R Johnson 3, (16%), +£0.52.

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0328 BRIGHT EAGLE (745) F1 R Lee 6/11.

0290 FULLARDSE (M) Chapman 5/11

0365 LOVETURTLE (220) B O Shewry 6/11.

0220 LOVETURTLE (18) Chapman 6/11.

0465 MANGY TOUT (20) Kinsella 7/11.

20-10 NECKER (50) [G] Williams 5/11.

25-28 ORANG OUTAN (21) H Tait 6/10.

0208 GREEN TANGO (21) H Tait 6/10.

0209 BRIGHT EAGLE (745) C O Shewry 6/10.

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ALL THE ACES

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POKER AND BONDAGE!

A delightful combination and the producers of Casino Royale certainly put the shackles on their actors to get the high drama scene looking authentic in the latest James Bond epic.

Apparently the playing of Texas Hold'em swept through the cast and crew of the movie like a virus. Michael Wilson, the movie's producer, personally trained the film's villain Le Chiffre (smoothly portrayed by Mads Mikkelsen) to play Hold'em, drawing on years of his personal experience and genuine love of the game. All nine of the opposing actor-players facing Bond across the poker table were individually schooled by legendary card expert Thomas Sanbrook. Carefully he taught everything from betting techniques, knuckle juggling chips, how to examine hole cards without revealing them and developing an individual poker characteristic for each of the actor's on-screen personalities. Director Martin Campbell, who spent no less than three and a half weeks filming the card game, described it as the toughest scene in the film to capture. If you've seen any of the huge budget action sequences you'll begin to grasp the gravity of that statement.

"I needed it to be as compelling as any of the more obvious action takes!" Well, it certainly worked. Martin's parting word of advice to all poker players is "Never play against actors. After all it's their job to be able to create a credible poker face. And believe me they can. I lost every game I played against Daniel!"

This might explain why actors like Ben Affleck and Leonardo Di Caprio are naturally gifted poker players.

A SPECIAL QUESTION

Q: Can you explain what a "straddle raise" is please? I keep hearing it being used and I can't figure out the context where it applies?

A: It's a difficult one to grasp if you're new to the game. If a player is under the gun (sitting just to left of the big blind), whose job it is to open the first round of betting and decides to post a doubled-up bet before any cards are dealt that would be described as a straddle raise. Effectively the player concerned is committing himself, and anyone else at the table who wants to gamble with him, to a raised pot before he's even seen his hole cards. This is would normally be seen as a crazy move as you have lousy position and the odds are against you having a strong hand. However, experienced players will often do it at a new table to create the illusion of a "loose" persona. This draws the fish in for the shark to eat later.

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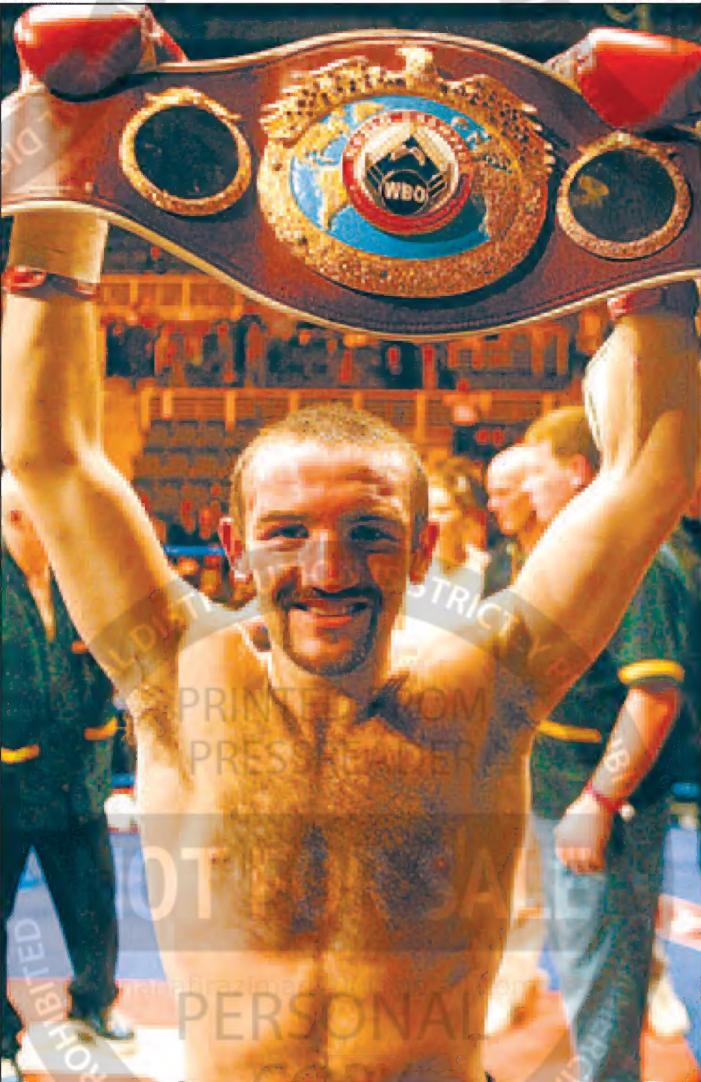
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Harrison vows to move up a weight

SCOTT: I'LL



IT'S SCOTT TO GO: Harrison with the world title belt he has had to give up

Shamed ace axed by Warren

DISGRACED Scots boxer Scott Harrison has vowed to fight on despite facing financial ruin AND being dumped by his promoter Frank Warren.

Harrison relinquished his WBO featherweight crown when he pulled out of his title defence against Londoner Nicky Cook at London's ExCel Arena tomorrow night.

The 29-year-old was released from a Spanish prison only last month but passed a series of stringent medical tests to get the green light to fight on before his last minute withdrawal.

He failed to turn up for a scheduled weight check-in this week after apparently going AWOL and mysteriously piling on 4lbs – a crucial addition that made it virtually impossible for him to lose around 11lbs in order to make the 9st limit in time for tomorrow's bout.

His late pull-out left promoter Warren saying: "I have promoted some of the nicest guys in the world, some of the guys who are not so bad and some of the guys who are the biggest a*****e you can meet!"

Rubber

"Everyone has bent over backwards to help him. If I bent over any further, I could get a job as an Indian rubber man in Gerry Cottle's Circus!"

"We are unhappy and seeking legal advice about this. There is going to be a lot of fall-out over it."

"Scott Harrison has now gone. As far as I am concerned, he is out of it and gone."

"You cannot deal with things when people are not telling you the truth and you are not getting the information."

"I had no knowledge at all that Scott was pulling out of the fight and it is all pretty dreadful."

However, after speaking with Harrison and his father and trainer, Peter, the boxer's manager Barry Hughes insists a plan for his future is already mapped out.

Hughes said: "Scott, Peter Harrison and I have spoken at length, as you would expect."

"Scott has assured me he wants to fight on and the natural progression of that will be to campaign at 130bs and super-featherweight."

"I am confident and equally determined to make sure this is not the end for Scott and he thinks the same way." He added:

5 FOR FUN

1 Which Manchester United player missed a penalty when they lost 1-0 to Celtic, in recent Champions League match?

2 Which Arsenal forward switched on the Christmas lights in Newbury, his home town, this year?

3 The boxing weight is Enzo Maccarinelli of Wales, the current WBU champion?

4 Which rugby league club in 1996, ended Wigan's nine year and 43 match unbeaten run in the Challenge Cup?

5 Which Brazilian F1 driver had 164 races before his first grand prix victory?

ANSWERS: See Page 77

SPORTWORD

ACROSS

- Hunt, Formula One world champion in 1976 (5)
- Sanderson, women's javelin Olympic champion (5)
- Valente and Brazil midfielder previously with Arsenal (3)
- Philippe, notorious French threequarter who played for Saracens (5)
- Jochen, Formula One world champion in 1971 (5)
- Carroll, captain of Manchester United's 1963 FA Cup winning team (4)
- Blackburn Rovers and New Zealand defender (4)
- Ian, West Indian fast bowler who played for Leicestershire (6)
- Zoe, women's cross country world champion (4)
- Vireni, Finnish athlete who won four Olympic gold medals (4)
- Jesse, American athlete who won four Olympic gold medals in 1936 (5)
- David, England and Manchester United and England defender (3)
- Ron, Liverpool and England half back who managed Liverpool Rovers (5)
- Anthony, men's 100 metres butterfly Olympic champion in 1988 (5)

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after being forced to surrender his title

CARRY ON SCRAPPING

by KEVIN FRANCIS

"Scott has always found it hard to make the nine-stone weight limit and he has paid for his spell in prison in Spain."

"That cost us nearly six weeks of training camp and meant Scott's weight loss would have to be concentrated inside a three-week period."

"Ultimately, as Scott's manager, I have to put the safety of my fighter first. Unfortunately, we had to call it off, but I will be standing by Scott."

The controversial Harrison, who is facing charges of stealing a car and assaulting a police officer arising out of incidents in Malaga where he spent six weeks in prison before being granted bail, is also threatened with bankruptcy.

He owes the Inland Revenue £83,000 and was only spared a bankruptcy ruling last week when it was agreed he would repay the bill out of his rumoured £250,000 fight fee for meeting Cook.

He is also due to stand trial on an assault charge in his native Glasgow in February.

Warren, meanwhile, has been left to pick up the pieces following Harrison's withdrawal and said: "We didn't have the courtesy of a call."

Mental

"We were made aware of the weight issue problem but that has always been a problem with Scott Harrison."

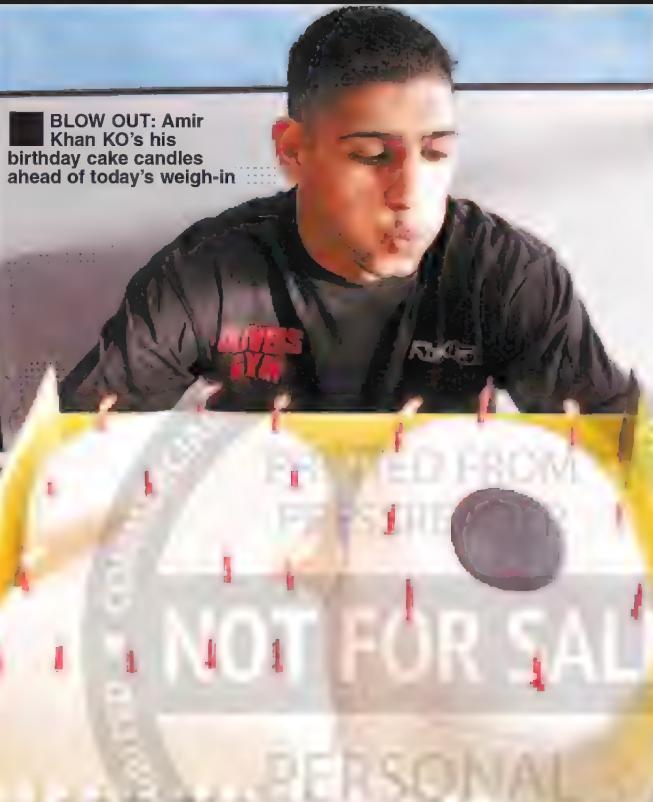
"I am disappointed. The first I heard about the weight problem was on Monday and it was not put to me in such a way as to make me feel the fight was in jeopardy."

The heavyweight rematch between Audley Harrison and Danny Williams will now top the bill, with Warren saying: "There is now real pressure on them because they have to deliver."

"There will be no excuses. They have both said they are in the best mental state they have ever been so now they have to show it."



WARREN: Seeking legal advice



KHAN TITLE TILT

AMIR KHAN celebrates his 20th birthday today by weighing-in for his first-ever title fight.

Khan's scheduled eight-round bout with Frenchman Rachid Drilzane at London's ExCel Arena tomorrow night has now been upgraded to a 10-rounder for the vacant IBF Inter-continental light-welterweight belt.

The move comes as part of a reorganised bill following the withdrawal of WBO world featherweight champion Scott Harrison.

Buoyant Bolton boy Khan said: "The rules say you

■ by KEVIN FRANCIS

can't fight for a title like this until you're 20 and I'm doing it one day after my birthday.

"It's only my 10th pro fight and I just can't believe I am in the ring going for a title."

Save

Khan, who won the light-weight silver medal at the Athens Olympics, added: "I have fought 10 rounds before in the gym and I will just have to adjust the way I fight because it is longer than I was expecting."

"I don't think you will see

me rushing out. I will take it steady so I can save my stamina in order to be able to go the whole distance."

Trainer Oliver Harrison and Khan's father Shah were involved in talks with promoter Frank Warren following Harrison's exit.

Khan said: "I had no hesitation. After all, it's something of a dream come true for me to go for a title so soon."

Harrison said: "He's ready for this."

"He's been training well and I have no concerns about him doing 10 rounds."

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TA 2 MY BOYFRENDZ M8 4 LETTING ME HAV HIZ SEASON TKT SEAT AT OLD TRAFFC ON WED NITE. MUFC FANZ... I WAS LOUDA DAN EWES TO ME OWN IN UR END. JOANNE EFC DONT WORRY LFC N MUFC MUGZ DA GOONERS WILL COME GOOD. WE WILL WALK AWAY WIV EVRYTHING GOING. YESS. LADYJ N LEE RUNCORN great move gallas you've left the champions to join uefa cup hopefuls! I bet left back looks pretty good now! Ha.ha. ryski

Reddin gets England boot

FITNESS coach Dave Reddin has joined Andy Robinson in being blamed for England's dire recent showings.

Reddin, who was part of England's World Cup-winning set-up in 2003, was sacked last night by the RFU after eight years in the job.

Clear

His departure comes barely a week after head coach Robinson left his post following eight defeats in nine Tests.

The 37-year-old made it clear he was unhappy with the decision to force him out.

He said: "Although the

■ by SAM PETERS

RFU have explained the rationale for their decision to make my role redundant I am disappointed to be leaving.

"It has been a great privilege to have been involved with England over the past eight years and almost 100 test matches."

RFU director of rugby Rob Andrew said: "Dave goes with our thanks and best wishes for the future.

"I'm sure he will continue to make a major contribution to elite sport in this country."

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IT'S A DANNY OLD GAME

By DANNY FULLBROOK, CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER



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The new BT channel, BT Vision, has joined up with Irish firm Setanta to offer an alternate package.

Live

As a result, 75 per cent of the 380 Premiership matches are being shown in full on BT Vision next season, either live or after 10pm on matchday.

With the new TV deal negotiated by Richard Scudamore starting next year, BT and Setanta have three years to try to match Sky's excellence.

It is a huge challenge but if they can pull it off then the battle for the prized Premiership package can only help drive prices down and make football cheaper for the fans to watch.

Blame Fergie for Euro heartache

GOLDEN GENERATION WASTED BY SIR ALEX

PATRICE EVRA paid Paul Scholes a huge compliment this week by comparing him to Zinedine Zidane.

The French full-back is not the first player to find himself incredibly impressed by the elegant Manchester United midfielder.

But let's get it straight ... Scholes is no Zidane and Sir Alex Ferguson has to take some of the blame.

There is no doubt Scholes has proved over the last decade that he has been one of the best midfielders in Europe.

But he has not produced when it has mattered most, right at the pinnacle of the game.

There have been no magical goals to set Champions League or World Cup finals alight, something Zidane can look back on in his career. In fact, the only time

United have reached the Champions League Final in 1999 Scholes, alongside Roy Keane, was famously suspended.

But the real crime is that during his career, which is enjoying something of a renaissance, United have only reached the European Cup Final once.

Scholes' failure in the international arena is partly down to himself, his former England team-mates and Sven Goran Eriksson in particular for playing him out of position.

Stamp

But when you look at United and their golden generation of home-grown players – which was coveted the world over – Fergie is the man to blame.

In response to Peter Kenyon's claims at Chelsea that they would soon become the biggest brand in football, the great Scot recently stated that a measure of a club is how they perform in Europe.

But Fergie has wasted a generation of stars.

The Treble of 1999 should have been a springboard for European dominance as United looked equipped to stamp their authority all over the continent with the likes of Scholes, Ryan Giggs, Roy Keane and David Beckham shining.

But Fergie let chance after chance slip, with only one further semi-final spot to crow about, and even then they lost to Bayer Leverkusen.

Last year they suffered the humiliation of not even making the knockout stages.

Fierce

Prior to that there were limp exits at the hands of Real Madrid, AC Milan and, most painfully, Jose Mourinho's Porto, who were beatable.

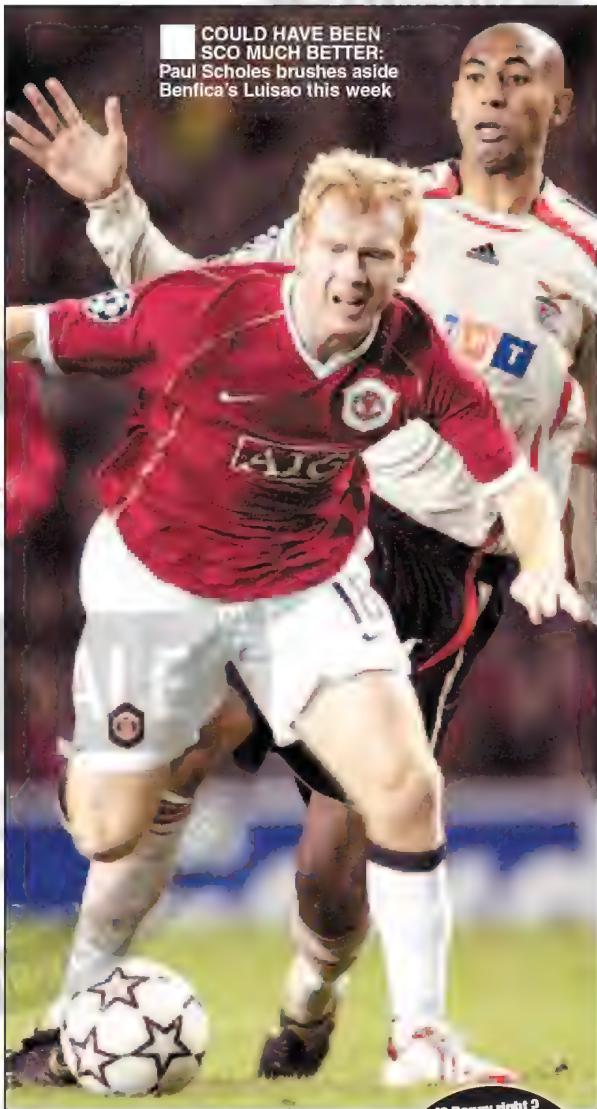
Maybe, just maybe, though, this season we might see a difference.

First of all in Wayne Rooney, Louis Saha and Cristiano Ronaldo they have an attacking force to match that of Andy Cole, Dwight Yorke, Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solsjaer.

Secondly, as in 1999, they are in a fierce title race which looks set to go to the wire.

The constant pressure of having to battle Arsenal for top spot in the Premiership was what helped keep United on top of their game that season.

There have been blips in



COULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH BETTER: Paul Scholes brushes aside Benfica's Luisao this week

the group stages this season but if Fergie gets those ironed out, there is no reason why United cannot go all the way.

Fergie was right when he said that with four English teams through to the knockout stages of the Champions League, there is a fantastic chance for a

Premiership side to win Europe's top honour. United's presence at the top of the Premiership will prove a spur to Chelsea, who know they need to conquer Europe to be considered among the real elite of continental football.

Let battle commence.

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SERIOUSLY
football

French ace predicts goal rush

SIB: WE'VE TOONED IT AROUND

IN-FORM Antoine Sibierski last night claimed Newcastle have solved the goal-scoring problems which had left them facing a relegation dogfight.

And the Toon's top scorer predicts Wednesday night's thrilling 3-2 win over Reading won't be the last time the goals are flowing for the Geordies.

Glenn Roeder's side went into that fixture with a miserly nine goals from their opening 14 league games.

Fans feared the worst when the visitors cancelled out Sibierski's opener to lead 2-1 at half-time, but Newcastle belatedly rediscovered their scoring touch to hit back through Obafemi Martins' first Premiership goal on home soil and Emre's late winner, extending their unbeaten record in all competitions to seven games.

Sibierski has emerged as the Toon's surprise hitman with six goals so far, more than he managed in any one season at Manchester City.

Quality

And he's confident that opposition nets will continue to bulge – even without the injured Michael Owen and Shola Ameobi.

He said: "We've had a bad period but we're playing better, winning more games and scoring more goals."

Reading could prove a real turning point.

"We showed a lot of character and that comeback will help us going into the next few games. It has given us a lot of confidence.

"I have no worries about the goals as there is enough quality in this team to create and convert chances."

Sibierski, 32, is having one of the best spells of his career after a miserable final season with City and he's relishing the new lease of life he's had under Roeder. The Frenchman

added: "He was the only one to believe in me and now I'm having my most enjoyable period. I have never been as happy as I am here.

"I've scored six goals and am delighted to be top scorer because scoring goals is what I was brought here for."

"I never scored more than five at City and have already beaten that."

"My best haul was 23 at Nantes and I will settle for matching that."

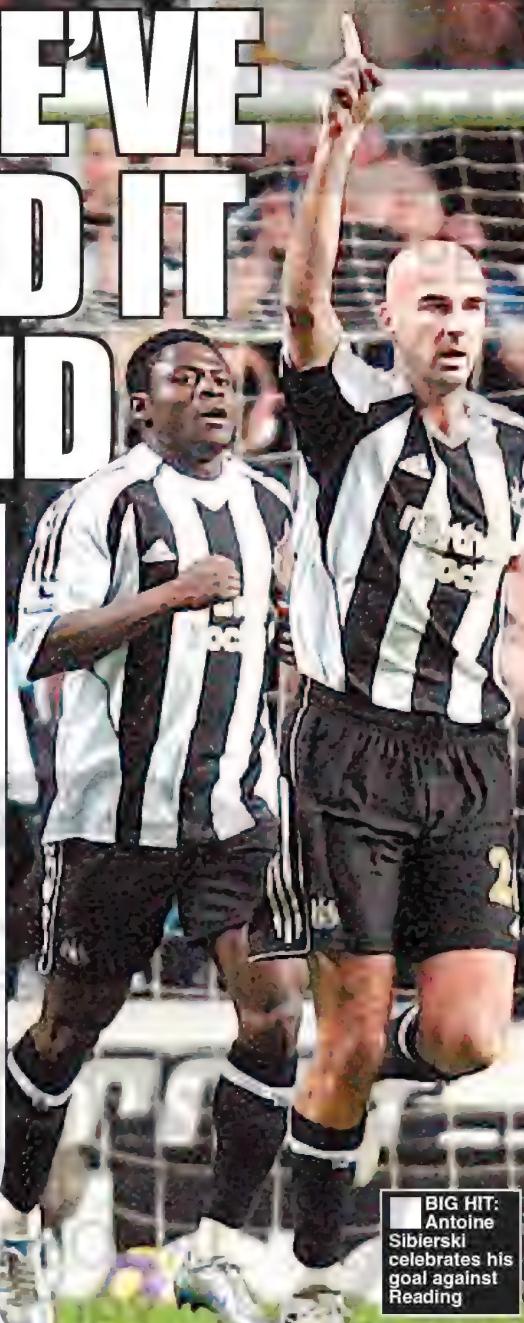
Despite seeing his side notch up their fourth league win of the season, Roeder must decide whether to keep faith in Celestine Babayaro who came in for some fierce stick from fans after a nightmare display.

Fans

But team-mate Nolberto Solano has appealed to the Toon Army to go easy on the former Chelsea defender.

He said: "I hope they give him a better reception next time because we are all in this together."

"I love our fans but that wasn't good for Celestine. They should understand he has just come back from injury."



BIG HIT:
Antoine
Sibierski
celebrates his
goal against
Reading

Pards the Ice man

by RALPH ELLIS

ALAN PARDEW last night warned his under-performing stars that his patience with them is rapidly running out.

West Ham's boss is preparing wholesale changes before tomorrow's tough trip to Bolton as he views the wreckage of Wednesday's dreadful display against Wigan.

He warned: "I have been very loyal to the tried and trusted players, but whether I stay loyal will be a decision I have to make before Saturday."

Hammers' turned away a bid from Arsenal.

Pardey, who knows his own neck is on the block after the club's £85million takeover, wants to pass the pressure to his dressing room.

He warned: "I have been very loyal to the tried and trusted players, but whether I stay loyal will be a decision I have to make before Saturday."

Icelandic bank boss Bjorgolfur Gudmundsson, who put up the cash to back his friend Eggert Magnusson's buy-out, was at Upton Park for the first time on Wednesday and couldn't have been impressed.

And Pardey, who faces a massive month of pressure, admitted: "If my players didn't already realise they were in a relegation fight, then they should know now."



PARDEW: Warnings

Kitson's new KO

■ by SCOTT COLEMAN

READING striker Dave Kitson's injury jinx has struck again as he was ruled out for six weeks following an appendix operation.

Kitson has been missing since damaging his knee on the opening day of the season and just as he was recovering from that injury he strained a hamstring in training.

But on Wednesday he was admitted to Reading's Royal Berkshire Hospital where he had surgery which will keep him out until the end of January.

Kevin in court bid

■ by GEORGE SCOTT

FORMER Leeds boss Kevin Blackwell has launched a High Court bid for compensation from the Championship club.

Blackwell was sacked by Ken Bates in September with almost three years left on his contract.

The League Managers' Association claim Blackwell was dismissed for comments made to the media about financial matters at Elland Road.

An LMA statement said: "Kevin Blackwell and the LMA are very disappointed that they have been forced into this position."

Cott it by George

■ by RALPH ELLIS

DAVID COTTERILL has one regret about his first Premiership goal – his middle name secret is out!

The Wigan winger's Manchester United dad gave him the full name David Rhys George Best Cotterill – and now everybody knows about his goal against West Ham.

Cotterill, 19, Paul Jewell's £2m signing from Bristol City, admitted: "All the lads know, and call me 'Bestie', but I've always tried to keep it quiet."

"I've had quite a bit of stick over the years when people find out."

Fern: I'm the one

■ by PETER WHITE

PORTRUGUESE midfielder Manuel Fernandes will be given his last chance to seal a permanent move to Portsmouth when he lines up against Everton at Fratton Park tomorrow.

Fernandes will cover for suspended countryman Pedro this week with Pompey boss Harry Redknapp unsure whether to make his loan spell a permanent move.

Benfica are demanding a £7m fee and it is unlikely Pompey will meet that – but Redknapp said: "He has the potential to become a top player."

City takeover talks

MANCHESTER CITY last night became the latest club to be linked to a massive takeover bid.

City chairman John Wardle is reportedly ready to step down after his club opened talks over a £70m takeover by a mystery investor.

Negotiations are at an early stage but Wardle confirmed yesterday he and business partner David Makin, the club's majority shareholders, are prepared to hand over control.

Hands

The Premiership elite have become prime targets for investors with Chelsea, Manchester United, Aston Villa, Portsmouth and West Ham all now in foreign hands.

Only this week Liverpool were linked with a massive £450m takeover bid from Dubai billionaire Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al

■ by IAN WHITTELL

Maktoom's Dubai International Capital Investment company.

But City would not say whether their investors are from abroad.

Billionaire mobile phone entrepreneur John Caudwell is one name that has been in the frame.

Wardle said: "As far as I'm concerned, anyone who can come into the club and improve things, we would welcome with open arms."

"We are talking now to a party. It's the early stages but hopefully something will come of it."

"We are prepared to pass the baton and let them take the club forward."

"The major thing for David and myself is that this football club moves forward – and back into the honours."

"We do recognise that the club

needs investment and we have been working hard to bring investment in."

Lifelong City fans Wardle and Makin, multi-millionaires from their sportswear empire JD Sports, own just under 30 per cent of the Premiership outfit.

And between them, the pair have gifted City just under £20m worth of interest-free loans.

Rebel

City have admitted for the first time that they will reluctantly listen to offers for transfer rebel Sylvain Distin in the January window.

But Wardle insisted boss Stuart Pearce will be consulted before City cash in on the French centre-half.

Distin was a serious summer transfer target for Middlesbrough and had talks with Gareth Southgate before a move collapsed over personal terms.

SERIOUSLY CHAMPIONS



FOCUSED:
Manchester United can go all the way in Europe says fired-up captain Gary Neville

ROAD TO ATHENS GLORY

MANCHESTER UNITED could face Real Madrid and Liverpool could be pitted against Celtic in the draw for the next stage of the Champions League.

Group winners will be drawn against a runner-up but can't face a team from their qualifying group or side from the same country. For example, Chelsea CAN'T play Barcelona.

The draw is a week today in Nyon, Switzerland.

Knockout dates – last 16: Feb 20-21 and Mar 6-7; quarter-finals:

Apr 3-4 and Apr 10-11; semi-finals: Apr 24-25 and May 1-2; final (Athens): May 23.

Group winners **Runners-up**

CHELSEA	Barcelona
Bayern Munich	Inter Milan
LIVERPOOL	PSV Eindhoven
Valencia	Roma
Lyon	Real Madrid
MAN UNITED	CELTIC
ARSENAL	Porto
AC Milan	Lille

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LEAGUE: Skipper sees nothing to fear

NEV: WE'RE READY FOR FINAL FLING

GARY NEVILLE has ordered his Manchester United team-mates to make up for last season's Champions League disaster by going all the way this time.

Neville reckons Sir Alex Ferguson's troops have nothing to fear – even though they face a potential last 16 date with Euro heavyweights Real Madrid or Barcelona.

United's 3-1 victory over Benfica on Wednesday made up for the hurt of 12 months ago when the Portuguese club denied the Red Devils a place in the knockout stages.

And Neville, 31, sees no reason why United cannot go all the way to the final in Athens next May. The United skipper said: "We're in a cup competition, three ties before a final."

"All the teams that are in there will think they've got a chance of winning it."

"A little bit of luck, form, taking your chances, anything can happen."

Neville is delighted to put Europe on the back-burner until February and concentrate on extending United's lead at the top of the Premiership.

Stupid

Victory in tomorrow's Old Trafford showdown with Manchester City would extend their lead to nine points over Chelsea, who don't play until Sunday.

But Neville is still clearly annoyed United came close to blowing it in Europe once again, even though they made a flying start.

He added: "To win the first three games and then be in that position on the final day was stupid."

"It was unacceptable last year and, with the teams that have qualified, that's where this team needs to

■ by NEIL JOHNSTON

be – playing against those big teams."

"*Looking at the teams that have qualified, I don't think there are any easy ties.*"

He added: "It's very difficult at this stage to see who will be the form teams in February."

"You can get injuries, suspensions, loss of form."

"But now we can just focus on the Premiership and forget about Europe for the next few months."

Gabriel Heinze, set to start the Manchester derby after Patrice Evra hobbled out of the Benfica game, backed Neville's claims that United have the squad to be crowned kings of Europe.

The Argentine defender said: "If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be here working for that goal."

"I consider us to be one of the biggest teams around and I consider that we've got as good a chance as anyone to win the whole thing."

Danny Old Game: P74

not have a better opportunity all season to open up such a huge gap on Mourinho's reigning champions. But Giggs is aware City will be desperate to wreck United's title ambitions.

Giggs added: "It's a great game to be involved in. You never quite know what is going to happen, that's what makes it so special."

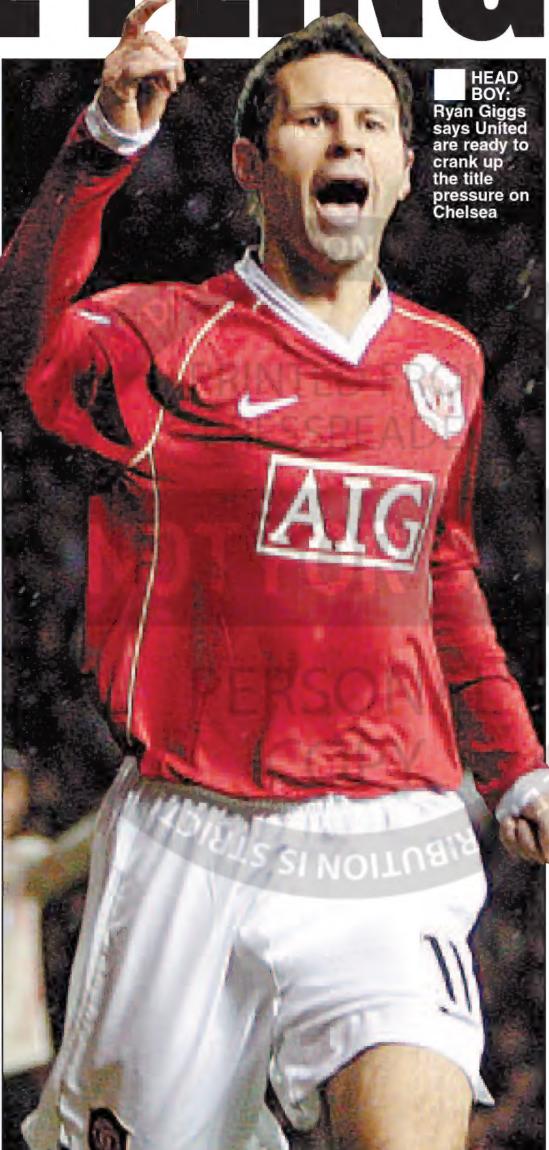
United go into what could be a hugely significant weekend on the back of a confidence-boosting 3-1 win over Bonfica.

Giggs, who scored one and made another against Benfica, reckons Europe's elite will be anxious to avoid United when the draw is made a week today.

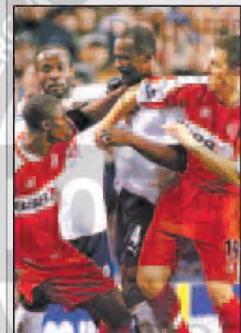
He said: "If we are still in the same form when the knockout stages are played no-one will want to play against us. Nobody is going to relish coming to Old Trafford in the form we are showing."

Giggs' challenge

From Back Page



HEAD BOY:
Ryan Giggs says United are ready to crank up the title pressure on Chelsea



BRAWL: Boateng (left) and Zokora

Information Station

CRICKET

International Series (1-day)
Faislabad: West Indies 151 (49.5 overs), Pakistan 154-8 (48.2 overs).
Pakistan lost by 2 wickets.

GOLF

European PGA Tour: Dunhill Championship: Netherlands (South Africa) 1st Round (GB & Ireland not stated, par 72): 68 P Archer, W De Haan (S Afr), C Schwartzel (S Afr), A Tadini (Ita), O Wilson; 69 R Cabrera (Spa), A Colletta, D Higgins, A Michael (S Afr), S Walker; 70 J Axgen (Swe), B Baham, P Edberg (Swe), I Hutchings (S Afr), A McLarty (S Afr), L O'Connor (S Afr), B Mallette (S Afr), M Pilkington, R Ross, D Terblanche (S Afr), 71 L Bond, H Buhmann (S Afr), A Cruise (S Afr), S Drummond, O Fisher, J Fisher (S Afr), W Geyer (S Afr), B Lamprecht (S Afr), G Lockhart, G Muller (S Afr), H Otto (S Afr), A Raft, T Whitehouse; 72 A Butterfield, D Carter, A de Silve (Brazil), R Edwards (Ang), E Eason (S Afr).

World Cup (Barbados): 71 - Fourballs: 65 Germany (B Langer/M Sleim); 67 Colombia (C Villegas/M Marizalde); 68 Australia (J Sinden/M Hensby).

SNOOKER

UK Championship (Barbican, York): 2nd round: 5 McGuire (Sco) bt J Swail (NI) 9-8, 6 S Lee (Eng) bt R Lawler (Eng) 9-6, 8 Williams (Wal) bt G Greene (NI) 9-7, R O'Sullivan (Eng) bt R Walden (Eng) 9-8, 9 Davis (Eng) bt J Burnett (Sco) 9-5.

TODAY'S DIARY

BASKETBALL

BBB Championship: Sheffield Sharks v Guildford Heat (7.30pm), Nottingham Hawks Newcastle Eagles v Scottish Honda Honda Rocks (7.30pm).

BOXING

British lightweight title (Alexandra Palace, London) – L Meager v J Thaxton.

CRICKET

One-Day Series (2nd international): Fatullah: Bangladesh v Zimbabwe (3.30pm).

GOLF

European PGA Tour: Dunhill Championship: Mpumalanga, South Africa; Barbados World Cup – Country Club Course, St James Barbados; Australian PGA Championship: Hyatt Regency Coolangatta, Queensland, Australia.

MOTOR RACING

A1 Grand Prix (Senita, Indonesia) – Qualifying (7.30pm unless stated).

RUGBY UNION

Bourgoin v Leicester (7.30pm unless stated).

European Challenge Cup

Bayonne v Bristol (6pm) Connacht v Montpellier (6.30pm) Glasgow v Narbonne Montauban v Newcastle (6pm) Newport-Gwent v D Bucuresti

YESTERDAY'S SPORTWORLD

ACROSS: Bradford, 10 Robin, 8 Faldo, 9 Arsene, 10 Port, 12 Nikki, 14 Anderson, 15 Vale.

DOWN: 1 Bulls, 2 Athens, 3 Five, 4 Hako, 5 Paris, 6 Tomorow, 11 Games, 13 Known, 15 Rohan, 16 Vale.

FIVE FOR FUN ANSWERS

1 Louis Saha, 2 Theo Walcott, 3 Cruyff, 4 Sallord, 5 Rubens Barrichello.

HOUL-BE MI HERO

GERARD HOULLIER wants a reunion with Milan Baros to help solve a striker crisis at Lyon.

Houllier is trying to strike a deal with Aston Villa boss Martin O'Neill to take Baros on loan for the rest of the season – with the option of a £5m deal in the summer.

Former Liverpool boss Houllier signed Baros, 25, during his stint at Anfield.

Offer

A foot injury kept him out for the opening part of this season and he hasn't scored a Premiership goal.

But Houllier wants Baros' experience for the last 16 phase of the Champions League.

Baros is also wanted by Hamburg, who had a £7m offer for him turned down in the summer.

O'Neill will be willing to listen to offers if it helps him raise funds for his No.1 transfer target, Spurs striker Robbie Keane.

I NEED LUCAS AID



NEILL: Part of Kop swap plan

RAFA BENITEZ plans to make Lucas Neill his first new year signing – without spending any of the millions likely to be ploughed into Liverpool from the proposed Dubai takeover.

The Anfield boss wants to swap Blackburn defender Neill with Stephen Warnock, 24, and believes he can get the Australian despite him being linked with Barcelona, Chelsea and Newcastle.

Jump

Neill made it clear that he would jump at the chance to join the FA Cup holders in the summer but Blackburn dismissed a bid of £1.5m for the 28-year-old as derisory and demanded £4m.

Then the two clubs were unable to agree valuations for the two players when an exchange deal involving Neill and left-back Warnock, currently recovering from groin surgery, was discussed.

But Benitez knows that Blackburn can no longer place such a high valuation on

■ by CHRIS HARPER

Neill, whose contract expires in little more than six months, and Rovers seem resigned to losing a player who cost them £1m from Millwall in 2001.

Chairman John Williams said: "Lucas has said he would like to look at fresh challenges. It is between us and him whether he leaves in January or at the end of the season."

Benitez is waiting to see what size war chest he gets if the takeover by Dubai International Capital is completed before the end of the year.

DIC's £450m bid includes £170m for buying control, £80m for clearing debts and £200m to pay for the new 60,000-seater stadium.

But DIC chief executive Sameer Al Ansari said earlier this week: "We hope we can agree a deal that will provide the club with the funds it needs, both on and off the pitch."

SERIOUSLY
football

Striker's up for



ALL SMILES:
Emmanuel
Adebayor gets a
celebration pat
off Thierry Henry

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Cashley's in the firing line

From Back Page
back loads of stick at Stamford Bridge.

Cole, nicknamed 'Cashley', attacked his former club for offering him £5,000 a week less than promised on a new contract, and hit out at a number of his old Arsenal teammates in his book, which flopped.

Lehmann, 38, thinks it's ridiculous for Cole and other English players to write books halfway through their careers.

Asked if he had read it, he said: "To be honest, I am not fancying books from players who are 24 or 25 who would like to tell me about their big experience. When I consider my age, I would have a lot to tell."

"It seems to be an English habit to come out with books that really nobody needs. When I retire, I will probably write a book. Of course I will understand him getting stick

from Arsenal fans. He should get it. That's football and makes it exciting."

"He was a vital member of our squad and we had big success with him so he has to expect some negative emotions towards him."

Lehmann also questioned whether Cole has improved as a player since his summer move.

Rival

He added: "I always liked Ashley. We had a big success together and I am really looking forward to playing against him. We will see if he is getting stronger in the Chelsea squad or not."

There is no love lost between the two clubs and the Cole factor will increase the intensity on Sunday.

Arsene Wenger and Jose Mourinho had a war of words last season, with the Chelsea boss accusing his rival of being a "voyeur".

a derby war as he gets ready to rumble with Terry and Co

WE'VE GOT ALL GUNS BLAZING

says Arsenal's MANU ADEBAYOR



by DANNY FULLBROOK

ARSENAL hitman Emmanuel Adebayor has warned Chelsea to get ready for a 'war' at Stamford Bridge.

The Gunners' striker is cranking himself up for the physical battle he expects when coming up against John Terry for the first time.

And he claims Arsenal will be spurred on with the extra incentive of trying to win for injured Chelsea old boy William Gallas - an 80 per cent doubt for the game.

Adebayor knows what it takes to score on the big stage for Arsenal, grabbing the winner against Manchester United at Old Trafford and the opener against arch-rivals Spurs last weekend.

So he is not lacking confidence in his ability to lead the line in the absence of skipper Thierry Henry.

Adebayor is relishing the challenge of blunting Chelsea's title hopes while breathing new life into their own now that Arsenal are through to the Champions League knockout stages.

He said: "I love the physical challenge. I like the pressure of big, important games like Manchester United and Tottenham. This Chelsea game is the same."

"This is a great chance for me. It will be another war but the important thing is to be ready for battle."

Fear

"I've never played against John Terry and Ricardo Carvalho. I have played against a lot of big defenders like Ferdinand and Vidic. It is a big challenge and you have to find out for yourself if you can perform against the big players."

"As a player you always want to achieve something in life. We are going to play Chelsea on Sunday and we have to believe the Premiership is not over. We have to keep playing right until the end."

"We know Sunday will be one of the biggest games in England, even the world, so you just have to enjoy it and show no fear. Hopefully we will win."

"We have to be ready mentally and have to put up a real challenge to our opponents."

You could see against Tottenham and Porto that we had a lot of players out but we still have a good team, good players and we are playing together as a family."

"We know Thierry was somewhere watching against Porto and we had to do the job for him, as well as William. We are proud to be through to the knockout stages."

"We will have to play for William on Sunday and do the job for him. He is one of our very important players. But with him not there in the side we will have to win."

"As a player you have to have a lot of dreams and we will be aiming to do to Chelsea what we did to Manchester United earlier this season. It will be very difficult and very tough as we are playing against

one of the best defenders in the world in John Terry.

"They also have good players in Ashley Cole and Didier Drogba, who can score at any moment. I hope we will win."

Henry was outspoken last week about the fact he expects manager Arsene Wenger to be active in the January transfer window.

But the Gunners boss has said he will stick with the same squad and Adebayor feels it is necessary to repay Wenger for the faith he has shown in them.

He said: "The fact the boss has said that is very important. That shows he has the confidence in us and we have to prove he is right to have that."

"If a boss says he does not need to buy any players it means that he is happy with those he has. We have to show him we are happy to be here and we have to win a lot of games."

"We have to play for him and put all our heart into our performances."

"We sometimes play well but we also miss a lot of chances and goals this season. It is part of life but we have to put it right."

Arsenal stand-in skipper Gilberto is delighted his side have bounced back since losing to Fulham and insists against Chelsea his team have to continue proving they can survive without Henry.

The Brazilian said: "We know what we have to do to win this game against Chelsea. It's not going to be easy, always when we go there it's a difficult match."

Easy

"Everyone's trying to do their best (without Thierry), he's very important for us, the leader of the team, the captain but I think we have shown our character in the games we have played (without him)."

"Against Chelsea it will be the same. We need to give 100 per cent concentration."

"We have a chance, like we did against Man U and Tottenham when he wasn't there and we did so well in those games. Now we must do the same."

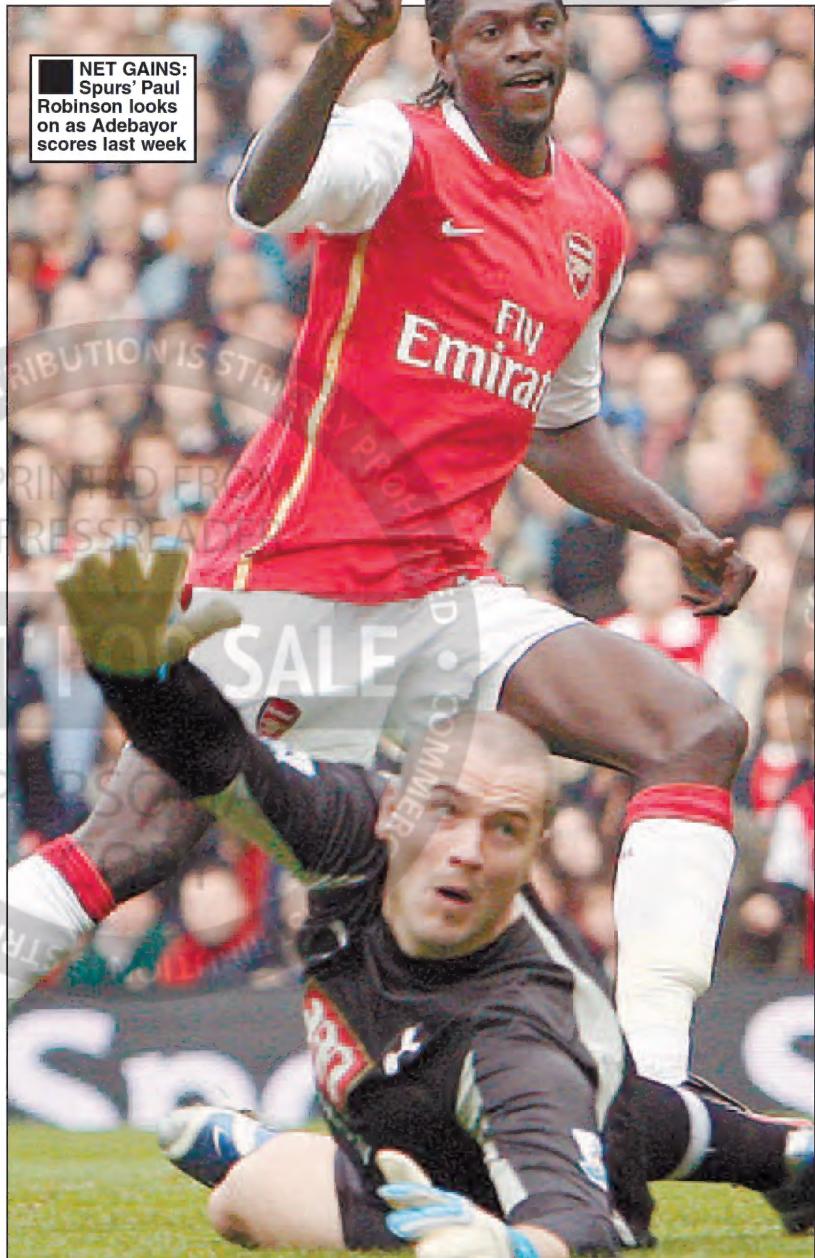
"In five days we've had two difficult matches to save our season. Both games were good preparation to play Chelsea. We'll try to narrow the gap. We'll do our best but it's not going to be easy."

Of his new role in the side, Gilberto said:

"I'm enjoying being captain."

"It's a lot more responsibility for me but I'm very proud of being captain of Arsenal in Thierry's absence."

"I think Arsene believes in me quite a lot to choose me as captain."



NET GAINS:
Spurs' Paul
Robinson looks
on as Adebayor
scores last week

TOP SIX

Barclays Premiership

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd.....	16	13	2	1	35	8	41
Chelsea.....	15	11	2	2	25	8	35
Arsenal.....	15	7	4	4	25	12	25
Portsmouth.....	16	7	4	5	21	14	25
Liverpool.....	16	7	4	5	19	15	25
Reading.....	16	8	1	7	19	21	25



Giggs: We are Mour fired-up

RYAN GIGGS last night warned Jose Mourinho that Manchester United are ready to test Chelsea's bottle.

Sir Alex Ferguson's in-form troops will go NINE points clear at the top of the Premiership if they defeat neighbours Manchester City in tomorrow's Old Trafford show-down.

And Giggs reckons that will put Chelsea under huge pressure ahead of their London derby with Arsenal on Sunday. The Welsh wing wizard said:

"We have been chasing Chelsea for the last couple of seasons. Now we want to see how they react to chasing us."

Pressure

"They are a strong, experienced side and they don't make many mistakes."

"But we are in a position to put some real pressure on them before they have that tough game against Arsenal."

Giggs is urging his team-mates not to blow their chance of securing a first title since 2003.

The evergreen ace believes United will

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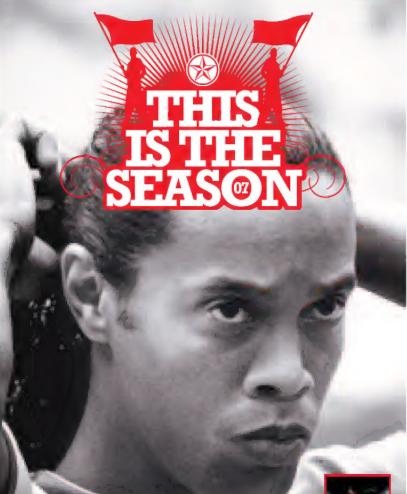


GIGGS: Chelsea challenge

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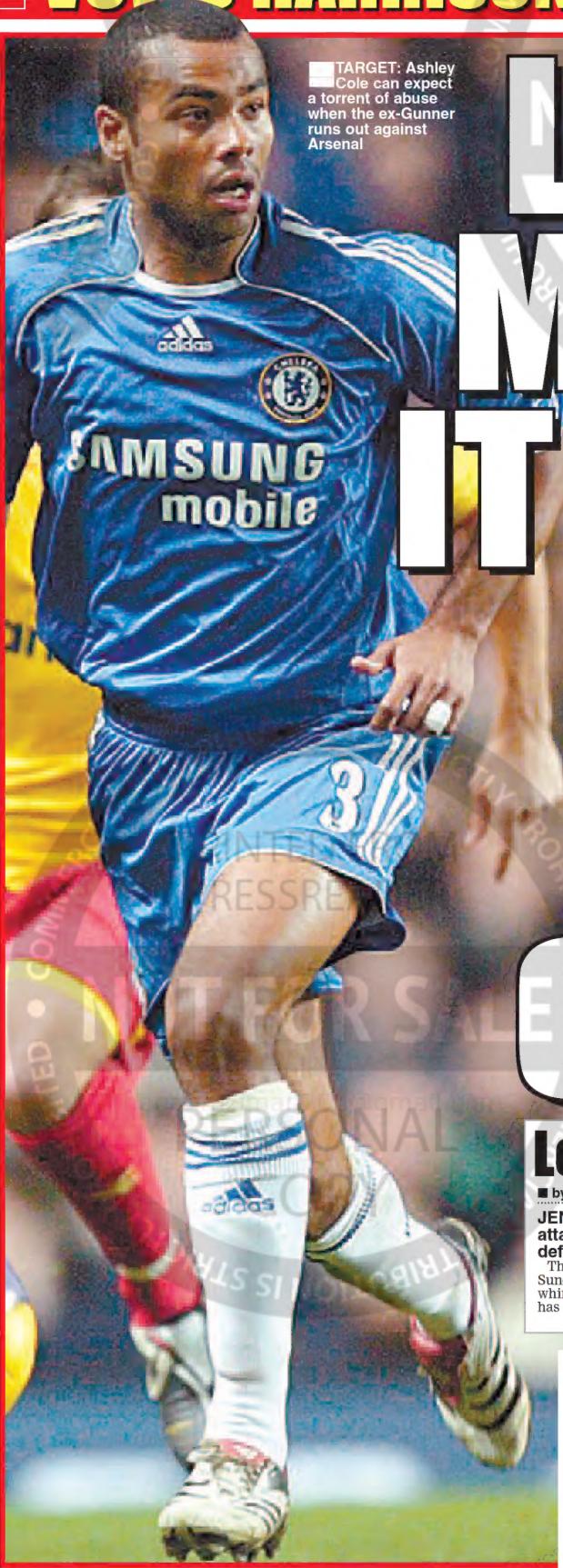
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TARGET: Ashley Cole can expect a torrent of abuse when the ex-Gunner runs out against Arsenal

LET'S
MAKE
IT RED
HOT
FOR
COLE

Lehmann's blast

by DANNY FULLBROOK

JENS LEHMANN has launched a blistering attack on Ashley Cole and warned the Chelsea defender he deserves to get verbal abuse.

The Arsenal keeper has cranked up the pressure for Sunday's Premiership clash by slaughtering Cole over his whingeing autobiography. And the controversial German has insisted Gunners fans should give their former full-

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